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ABSTRACT

The shrinking number of new entrants into the U.S. workforce and the smaller proportion of new workers who are well-educated will put organizations dependent on highly qualified personnel in competition for the short supply of qualified individuals. Thus, recruiting strategies will be of increasing concern to many organizations. The research reported here introduces a method for assessing perceptions of potential applicants and was conducted for a state highway department concerned with attracting qualified applicants for civil engineering positions. The sample consisted of 91 undergraduate students in civil engineering or civil engineering technology at 6 universities. The questionnaire was composed of items regarding expectations about employment with the highway department, the importance of various job attributes, and other relevant issues. Ratings on 39 items regarding expectations about employment with the highway department were compared to ratings of importance to the students on the same 39 items. Perceived weaknesses included compensation, advancement, challenge and responsibility, and treatment by management. Strengths included family and other nonwork considerations, benefits, and a variety of career opportunities. This research demonstrated a simple procedure an organization can use for assessing perceptions of potential applicants. Information gained from this type of analysis can be used to determine how to convey information in the recruiting process to optimize attraction without setting unrealistically high expectations. (LLL)

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# Effective Recruiting: Assessing Perceptions of Potential Applicants

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This research was part of a larger project conducted by the Economic Development Institute, Auburn University, Dr. Bettye B. Burkhalter, Director, for the Highway Research Center, Auburn University, Dr. Frazier Parker, Jr., Director.

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Effective Recruiting:
Assessing Perceptions of Potential Applicants

## Problem

The shrinking number of new entrants into the U.S. workforce and the smaller proportion of new workers who are well-educated will put organizations dependent on highly qualified personnel in competition for the short supply of qualified individuals (Johnston & Packer, 1987). Thus, recruiting strategies will be of increasing concern to many organizations.

Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) would suggest that applicants are attracted to jobs that offer outcomes which are valuable to them (Heneman, Schwab, Fossum, & Dyer, 1989). Although job attributes have been found to strongly influence decisions to accept or reject jobs, limited research is available indicating which attributes are important to which applicants, and even these findings seem to vary considerably from situation to situation (Heneman et al., 1989). A more useful approach may be for each organization to assess the perceptions of its own potential pool of applicants.

The research reported here introduces a method for assessing perceptions of potential applicants and was conducted for a state highway department concerned with attracting qualified applicants for civil engineering positions.

## Method

The sample consisted of 91 undergraduate students in civil engineering or civil engineering technology at six universities.

The questionnaire developed for this research was composed

of items regarding expectations about employment with the highway department, items regarding the importance of various job attributes, and other relevant items.

The questionnaires were distributed in classes or meetings, during the registration process, or mailed individually. They were returned either by mail or turned in to their department.

Results

Ratings on 39 items regarding expectations about employment with the highway department were compared to ratings of importance to the students on the same 39 items (see table). These ratings were compared using t tests, and those items which were significantly different ($p<.05$) are designated in the table with asterisks.

Higher negative difference scores mean that what the students expect from the highway department falls short of how important it is to them. These perceived weaknesses included compensation, advancement, challenge and responsibility, and their treatment by management. Higher positive difference scores mean that what the students expect from the highway department exceeds their rating of importance. These strengths included family and other nonwork considerations, benefits, and a variety of career opportunities.

Interpretation

This research demonstrated a simple procedure an organization can use for assessing perceptions of potential applicants. Information gained from this type of analysis can be

used to determine how to convey information in the recruiting process to optimize attraction without setting unrealistically high expectations, as discouraged by Wanous (1980).

The following are some suggested uses of findings:

(a) The organization can review the areas which the potential applicants perceive as shortcomings and strengthen some of those areas or, where they have inaccurate perceptions, advertise hidden strengths.

(b) The organization can tailor recruitment information so as to emphasize what the potential applicants perceive as strengths.

(c) The organization can maximize its strengths by targeting applicants who value what the organization has to offer.

## References


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Johnston, W. B., & Packer, A. E. (1987). Workforce 2000: Work and workers for the twenty-first century. Indianapolis, IN: Hudson Institute.

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Table

## Difference Between Students' Expectations About the AHD and Their Ratings of Importance

| | *D* |
|---|---|
| A very high salary | -0.84* |
| Opportunities to be creative and imaginative in my work | -0.81* |
| High salary and good fringe benefits | -0.77* |
| Opportunities for personal growth and development in my job | -0.73* |
| Chances to exercise independent thought and action in my job | -0.64* |
| Quick promotions | -0.62* |
| High respect and fair treatment from my supervisor | -0.56* |
| Having control over your project | -0.52* |
| Stimulating and challenging work | -0.51* |
| Opportunity for advancement | -0.45* |
| Variety in work assignments | -0.38* |
| A sense of worthwhile accomplishment in my work | -0.35* |
| Enough pay to be secure | -0.35* |
| Rewards for good work | -0.32* |
| Fair company policies | -0.25* |
| Chance to use your education and abilities | -0.16 |
| Great job security | -0.16 |
| Opportunities to learn new things from my work | -0.14 |
| Opportunities to use state-of-the-art technology | -0.13 |
| Very friendly co-workers | -0.12 |
| Prestige of the employer | -0.08 |
| Chance to exercise leadership | -0.04 |
| Expert supervision | -0.02 |
| Feeling that what you do is important | -0.01 |
| High level of responsibility | 0.00 |
| Becoming an expert in what you do | 0.01 |
| Time for leisure activities | 0.04 |
| Living in your desired geographic location | 0.08 |
| Time with your family | 0.12 |
| Your family's satisfaction with your job | 0.17 |
| No requirement to transfer to a new location | 0.20 |
| Good fringe benefits | 0.21 |
| Opportunity to become licensed | 0.24* |
| Opportunity to pursue a master's degree | 0.32* |
| Being seen as successful | 0.33* |
| Opportunity to do design work | 0.40* |
| Not having to travel on the job | 0.46* |
| Lack of pressure in your job | 0.70* |
| Working in the field | 0.76* |

D = Difference (Expectations - Importance)
* Statistically significant difference, $p < .05$

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